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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 42: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/62/12 and Add.1 and A/62/316)

1. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing his reports (A/62/12 and Add.1 and A/62/316), said that the twenty-first century had been marked by increasing population movements resulting not only in conflicts and persecutions but also in extreme poverty, environmental degradation and climate change. In order to carry out its mandate, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had to understand such phenomena and take into account their complexity.

2. Unlike in previous years, 2006 had seen an increase in the number of refugees, to nearly 10 million and that trend was continuing in 2007. By the end of 2006, the number of refugees and displaced persons had reached 32.9 million. Currently, the largest group of refugees and displaced persons was made up of Iraqis, who were also the biggest group of urban refugees that UNHCR had ever dealt with.

3. The increasing number of refugees, the new institutional responsibilities of UNHCR, the ever-changing situation on the ground and the complexity of population movements required the Office to be dynamic and flexible in its activities. Although the topic of migration did not relate directly to its mandate, UNHCR was actively participating in the Global Migration Group and the Global Forum on Migration and Development and was studying the links between asylum and migration and their repercussions on protection. Moreover, UNHCR was providing assistance and protection to internally displaced persons under the inter-agency cluster approach adopted by the United Nations with regard to humanitarian affairs. Evaluations had found that operations had been enhanced, in general, by the introduction of the cluster approach, and the Office's engagement with internally displaced persons had not detracted from its core responsibilities.

4. As for repatriation and voluntary return, he noted that in 2006, 734,000 refugees had been voluntarily repatriated, half of whom had been directly assisted by his Office; thus far in 2007, over half a million refugees had returned home with UNHCR assistance. As he had reported to the Committee the previous year, repatriation must be accompanied by sufficient food and material assistance for refugees and displaced persons, who were often completely destitute. He underscored the enormous gulf between that assistance and post-war recovery, the only real solution to the problem. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, the "Delivering as One" initiative, the early recovery cluster and the multiplication of integrated United Nations missions were positive developments, for they opened up new prospects in that regard.

5. Since protection was its chief concern, UNHCR had launched an internal debate on protection standards and strategies and had established a working group to examine the critical issues of emergency response, strategic use of resettlement and the growing challenge of delivering protection in the context of growing migrations. The debate would not be exclusively internal: States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were being encouraged to take part in it. A special effort was being made to focus on displaced women and children, who were particularly vulnerable.

6. The best of the traditional solutions to the problems of refugees was voluntary repatriation in conditions of safety and dignity. Where that was not possible, other measures could be used, such as local integration or resettlement in a third country. In that regard, his Office had made significant advances on local integration in Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, the United Republic of Tanzania, West Africa and Zambia, in cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States and the Governments concerned. In the context of reshaping its Division of International Protection Services, UNHCR had also strengthened its capacity for resettling refugees, a process which had taken on strategic importance in view of the increasing number of refugees and the fact that many of them had been living in the host country for a long time (in Nepal, the Sudan and Thailand, for example).

7. The reform of UNHCR had been undertaken in the framework of ongoing United Nations reform efforts and was producing its first results. In 2007, expenditures on operations exceeded staff costs for the first time in 10 years. As a result, UNHCR had been able to allocate $15 million to fighting malnutrition and malaria, promoting reproductive health and

controlling sexual and gender-based violence in most of its operations. That success was the culmination of short-term measures, but the reform efforts went deeper, focusing on five initiatives: outposting (relocating Geneva administrative functions to Budapest, for example); decentralization and regionalization (to improve situational management, solutions planning and relocating support services closer to the point of delivery); a comprehensive field review (to determine which activities could be more effectively carried out by UNHCR partners and to make better use of national competencies); improvement of resource management by, among other things, setting up a new budget structure; and reform of human resources management.

8. Thanks to its efforts to control costs, together with favourable exchange rates, UNHCR had been able to improve its financial situation, with the additional help of strong backing from donors in 2007. The Office would therefore be able to deliver an unprecedented level of protection and assistance to the people under its care. Nevertheless, political leadership was needed to enable the international community to cope with all the new challenges; such leadership could come only from Member States, since they alone had the legitimacy to shape the strategies and instruments required.

9. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan), referring to the attempt by the French NGO Children Rescue to abduct about 100 children in refugee camps, asked whether UNHCR had issued a statement regarding the matter and whether measures had been taken to guarantee the safety of the children concerned, whose rights had been violated.

10. **Ms. Bana** (Iraq) emphasized that the question of Iraqi refugees and displaced persons in Iraq was not a new one, since a large number of Iraqis had become displaced or left the country because of despotism, successive wars and economic sanctions. Many refugees had returned to Iraq after the overthrow of the dictatorship but, because of the lack of security, violence, inter-communal tensions and terrorist attacks, a number of people had again fled or become displaced.

11. In a desire to find suitable solutions to their problems, the Iraqi Government had created a Ministry for Refugee Affairs and special committees and was endeavouring to establish security and economic conditions conducive to the families' return. That policy was starting to bear fruit and there were currently signs that the security situation was beginning to be stabilized, including in Baghdad. However, the problem was far from being solved. In that connection, she asked the High Commissioner whether the staff responsible for Iraqi refugees, who were very few in number, would be able to help them. She also asked whether UNHCR had taken steps to help Iraqi refugees in host countries.

12. **Ms. Tchitanava** (Georgia) referred to the situation of Georgians in Abkhazia and recalled the ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide inflicted on them by the Abkhazian separatists. She outlined the Georgian Government's strategy for improving the living conditions of refugees and displaced persons in Georgia and facilitating their professional and social integration and thanked UNHCR for the technical support that it had provided to the Government to help it to create a structure promoting full respect for the rights of displaced persons. The Georgian Government wanted to find a peaceful solution to the situation and hoped to obtain the necessary technical and financial support to speedily create, in cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations, conditions conducive to the return in safe and dignified conditions of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin — in other words to Abkhazia, Georgia and the region of Tskhinvali.

13. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine) asked what was the situation of the Palestinian refugees in Iraq and what assistance UNHCR was providing to them.

14. **Mr. Amangoua** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the question of refugees, returnees and displaced persons remained a priority for his country and that the Ivorian Government's determination to ensure the protection of those vulnerable populations had been amply demonstrated. His delegation had noted the recommendations made by the High Commissioner and assured him that Côte d'Ivoire would cooperate in the search for lasting solutions.

15. **Mr. Attiva** (Egypt) emphasized the importance of the existing arrangements for coordination between the Office of the High Commissioner and the other bodies working for displaced persons. Although the question of displaced persons was a separate issue, which should be dealt with as such and required the creation of specific machinery, the High Commissioner's report did not provide separate figures for refugees and

displaced persons, such as the exact number of displaced persons who had returned home over the past year. He asked whether the High Commissioner could give those figures and comment on them and whether the relevant figures could be provided in his next report.

16. **Mr. Khoshnaw** (Iraq), noting that certain parts of his first statement had been omitted in the interpretation, specified that it was terrorist activities, and not only violence, that constituted one of the main causes of population movements inside Iraq. He asked the High Commissioner what he thought about the forced return of certain Iraqi refugees.

17. **Mr. Shingiro** (Burundi) asked for more information on the UNHCR family reunification policy in the case of families settled in two or three countries in the same region, such as the Great Lakes region, for example.

18. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), replying first to the question from the representative of the Sudan, said that the Deputy High Commissioner was currently in the Sudan and that he had prepared, together with the Government and other United Nations bodies, a joint statement on the abduction of children in Chad. That incident was regrettable and unacceptable and UNHCR, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was working to find the children's families so that they could be returned to them in safe conditions and was ensuring that they received adequate assistance and that their rights were protected.

19. Replying next to the question from the representative of Iraq, he said that UNHCR attached considerable importance to the preservation of asylum possibilities outside Iraq. It was strongly opposed to forced repatriations to that country and believed that persons who had become displaced in the south or centre of Iraq should be able, on a case-by-case basis, to return to the north of the country. UNHCR was doing a great deal of work with the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, which allowed Iraqi refugees to obtain treatment under their health systems and enrolled their children in schools. Although it was difficult to help the most vulnerable families who had found refuge in cities and not in the camps, UNHCR was sparing no effort to improve their living conditions, in cooperation with the Syrian and Jordanian Red Crescent Societies and the Syrian and Jordanian Governments, with which he strongly urged the Iraqi Government to cooperate. Lastly, a resettlement operation had just started and could expand rapidly.

20. In reply to the question from the representative of Georgia, he praised the important strategy adopted by the Georgian Government to tackle the problem of the refugees and displaced persons and enable them to enjoy not only protection, assistance and the best possible living conditions but also the right to return. He emphasized, however, that the solution to the problem was not humanitarian but political and was therefore not within the mandate of UNHCR.

21. Replying to the question from the Observer for Palestine, he stressed that Palestinian refugees in Iraq had recently been targeted by certain communities which believed them to be linked to the former regime. Over 600 Palestinians, including women and children, had been killed and people were still stuck at the borders. UNHCR was working with the Palestinian National Authority and various countries to find a solution to that dramatic problem. On the other hand, the tragic situation of the Palestinian refugees in the vicinity of Palestine was within the purview of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, with which UNHCR was endeavouring to work in tandem.

22. He thanked Côte d'Ivoire which, despite its own problems, had taken in refugees from neighbouring countries and integrated them into its society and said that UNHCR had, with the Ivorian Government, set up a programme for the protection of displaced persons.

23. Replying to the question from the representative of Egypt, he said that there was indeed a difference between the way in which UNHCR operated in the case of refugees and stateless persons, who were its responsibility, and in the case of displaced persons, whom it assisted in the context of the work done by the international community. Governments, which were primarily responsible for ensuring the protection of displaced persons, were very important partners in that regard. For all those reasons, although UNHCR had participated in the return of only some of the 1,900,000 displaced persons who had returned home in 2006, it had made a major contribution to the repatriation of

750,000 refugees in 2006 and of half a million persons in the first half of 2007.

24. In reply to the question from the representative of Burundi, he explained that a very modern system of registration and documentation was used to identify members of the same family located in different countries. In cooperation with the authorities, UNHCR could thus bring them together, since family reunification was crucial in the resettlement process, and ensure that the higher interest of the children was respected, in accordance with the principles that it had established.

25. **Mr. Costa Pereira** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, paid tribute to the courage and commitment of UNHCR staff and drew attention to the disturbing increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons, which was mainly due to violence and armed conflicts. In that regard, he welcomed the adoption in October 2007 by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of several decisions aimed at strengthening cooperation on international protection and assistance, in particular the conclusion on children at risk. In view of their specific needs and vulnerabilities, children should be among the first to receive assistance. The debate on NGO participation in the Executive Committee had also been very enlightening, and in that connection he underlined the important work of NGOs, which were crucial UNHCR partners. Referring to the particularly worrying situation of displaced persons in Iraq and that of Iraqi refugees abroad, he also acknowledged the solidarity shown by the countries in the region, especially the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, which had provided relief to almost two million Iraqis.

26. Regarding the continuing security problems faced by humanitarian personnel and the attacks launched by armed groups in the Sudan, particularly in Darfur, he called on the Government of the Sudan to guarantee security and to entrust UNHCR with the necessary authority to protect displaced persons and to coordinate camps. In that regard, he welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1778 (2007) establishing a multidimensional presence in eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic, which would help to strengthen security in the region.

27. The European Union looked forward to participating in the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2007, which would focus on protection in the context of mixed population movements and on the UNHCR 10-Point-Plan of Action. The European Union firmly supported the restructuring of UNHCR and also welcomed the suggestions and proposals made by UNHCR in response to the Green Paper on the Future Common European Asylum System, which was to be implemented by 2010. In conclusion, he said that he hoped that the Committee's draft resolution on UNHCR would be adopted by consensus.

28. **Mr. Ileka** (Democratic Republic of the Congo), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, said that despite the consolidation of peace processes, some parts of Africa were still experiencing significant instability. The crises affecting those areas, whether new, renewed or intensified, were producing increased numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Humanitarian operations also remained challenging.

29. Referring to paragraphs 34, 35, 37, 50 to 55 and 90 of the Secretary-General's report on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/62/316), he stressed that the majority of those affected by conflict were women and children, who were thus in need of particular protection. With regard to family reunification, which must remain a priority, he pointed out that children separated from their parents and unaccompanied children needed additional safeguards during asylum procedures. The full implementation of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) was also critical for child protection.

30. With regard to the national and international measures taken to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence, he welcomed the adoption of a conclusion on women and girls at risk by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Comprehensive programmes involving the identification and treatment of survivors, fistula repair and psychosocial counselling, as well as measures to ensure women's participation in programme planning, were essential to facilitate their reintegration into their communities. He also commended the High Commissioner for allocating

resources to the health, nutrition and sexual and gender-based violence initiatives referred to in paragraph 34 of his report (A/62/12) and stressed that it was necessary to seek the relevant funding on a sustainable basis.

31. He also referred to paragraphs 6 and 9 of General Assembly resolution 61/137 on UNHCR which stipulated, inter alia, that the protection of refugees was primarily the responsibility of States, which must address all the aspects of that problem and provide assistance to countries that had received large numbers of refugees.

32. The situation in the southern African subregion remained of particular concern because of political instability and insecurity. Furthermore, the increasingly mixed flows of refugees and economic migrants were putting a strain on the asylum regime and had led to tighter border controls.

33. In that regard, he welcomed the efforts deployed by UNHCR to ensure that people in need of international protection were properly identified and noted with satisfaction that the cluster approach had produced good results in the area of addressing the needs of displaced persons. He also commended the work done by UNHCR, with the support of the international community, to assist African countries of asylum and to offer protection and assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa.

34. **Mr. Miyamoto** (Japan) said that he was concerned by the 14 per cent increase in the number of refugees since the previous year and by the persistence of protracted situations. His delegation attached great importance not only to the problems of refugees and displaced persons in countries such as Chad, Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Sudan, but also to long-term operations in Asia, for instance in Bhutan and Myanmar. In that regard, it intended to help UNHCR to provide vocational training to refugees, displaced persons and returnees with a view to developing their capacities and empowering them. Such projects could also be useful in effecting a seamless transition from relief to development.

35. Only structural reform and management change within UNHCR would enable it to respond effectively to refugee problems and to its growing workload. UNHCR must strike the right balance between staff and management costs and operational costs, formulate a more flexible and effective human resources strategy, widen the donor base and further strengthen its relationships with NGOs.

36. The international community and UNHCR could significantly improve their efforts to assist displaced persons. The cluster approach should be applied systematically to UNHCR activities in that sphere and such activities should not have any adverse effect on refugee operations. The international community should also determine whether the current arrangements for assisting displaced persons were adequate.

37. Welcoming the new members of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, he said that he hoped that they would respect the principles of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and contribute actively to UNHCR activities. He also noted that Japan would host the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 2008. The theme of the conference was "Towards a Vibrant Africa" and, more specifically, human security. That subject would also be considered at the Group of Eight (G8) Summit to be held in Japan.

38. **Mr. El Amin** (Sudan) stressed that his country was eager to cooperate with the various United Nations bodies in order to improve the living conditions of refugees, to guarantee their voluntary return to their countries and to ensure that they could once again live in security and dignity. He recalled that, since its independence, the Sudan had hosted thousands of refugees from neighbouring countries on account of religious belief and in line with international agreements on asylum.

39. He reaffirmed that the signature and implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had created an environment conducive to the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, and made it possible for hundreds of thousands of them to return to their towns and villages. Their resettlement, reintegration and return to a normal life required significant efforts in terms of housing, health, education and livelihoods. Some development projects could encourage a large number of refugees still in the south to return home.

40. His country was concerned about the lack of funding to cope with the voluntary return of refugees. He called on the international community to continue to support repatriation programmes until such time as

all Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries had returned home. He also asked donor States, particularly those that had participated in the Oslo Conference, to honour their commitments, especially as the Sudan had honoured all of its own. In that respect, he highlighted the new political situation created by the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

41. With regard to the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in Abuja, he noted the considerable progress made towards the creation of an environment conducive to the return of displaced persons and refugees. The agreement concluded between the Sudanese Government and the United Nations, which had led to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, reflected that spirit of cooperation. The Sudanese Government had unilaterally declared a ceasefire, thus demonstrating its sincere desire to reach a political solution with the rebel movements that had rejected the Abuja Agreement, with a view to implementing the various components of the Agreement and ensuring the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. In that regard, the Sudan wished to pursue its active partnership with UNHCR, the international community and the United Nations and its various bodies on the basis of the principle that burden-sharing should facilitate the transition from emergency assistance and relief activities to development activities in all areas affected by wars.

42. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that issues relating to system-wide coherence and the use of thematic clusters in certain humanitarian situations should be the subject of a detailed analysis at the intergovernmental level. While States were still discussing reforms designed to strengthen coherence, particularly in the humanitarian sphere, the institutional modalities mentioned in the High Commissioner's report should be used only following specific requests and with States' consent.

43. The Colombian delegation reiterated its request that UNHCR should standardize the figures in its reports and take into account the data provided by States. The figures for Colombia significantly overestimated the number of persons receiving direct assistance from UNHCR and the total number of displaced persons registered in the country during the past decade by means of the system established in 1997. The report appeared to contain mere estimates and did not specify the time periods covered; nor did it refer to the number of returnees or the number of families who had resumed normal lives. It was not possible to carry out a realistic and appropriate needs assessment or to take the necessary decisions if accurate and reliable data were not provided.

44. The report did not elaborate on activities carried out by the High Commissioner in cooperation with Governments, despite the fact that such cooperation was particularly important in the case of internal displacements. UNHCR should provide information on the measures taken to help countries to deal with the humanitarian consequences of such displacements.

45. The Colombian Government was meeting its responsibilities in respect of prevention, assistance and protection and was seeking sustainable solutions in order to stabilize its society and economy. Colombia had adopted progressive legislation and had developed a comprehensive assistance programme for displaced persons, which was being implemented in a decentralized manner. The budget for that programme for 2007-2010 had been increased to nearly $500 million a year.

46. As a result of the democratic security policy and the massive demobilization of illegal armed groups, as well as the prevention measures that had been implemented, the number of annual displacements had fallen by 44 per cent compared to 2002; 82 per cent of the households listed in the register of displaced persons had received emergency humanitarian assistance; and considerable progress had been made in the area of social services. As at August 2007, the programme had enabled 35,000 displaced families to return home.

47. Indicators made it possible to measure the programme's impact on the fundamental rights of displaced households, while the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation, which had been established in connection with the demobilization of illegal armed groups, ensured that displaced persons received reparation. The State had made great progress in that area, with the assistance of United Nations entities, including UNHCR, and other international organizations.

48. In addition to highlighting the cooperation between UNHCR and United Nations system entities, other international organizations and NGOs, the High Commissioner's report should also refer to the work done in cooperation with Governments — especially

since the latter bore primary responsibility for providing protection and assistance — and the High Commissioner's support for efforts to strengthen national institutions.

49. **Mr. Ke** Yousheng (China) said that his delegation was very concerned by the fact that, for the first time since 2000, the number of refugees in the world had risen considerably, now standing at almost 10 million. Noting that only 45 per cent of the refugee population had enjoyed UNHCR assistance in 2006 — in other words, a 3 per cent drop compared to 2005 — he expressed the hope that UNHCR would study carefully the reasons for that drop and define clear measures and strategies in order to broaden the scope of the protection it offered to refugees throughout the world. He welcomed the Office's role as lead agency for all matters relating to protection and assistance and expressed the hope that, where displaced persons were concerned, it would adhere strictly to the relevant General Assembly resolutions. The Office should also continue to carry out real-time evaluations of its activities so as to ensure that the protection of displaced persons did not undermine its fundamental mission, namely refugee protection. In that connection, he welcomed the progress made with regard to the process of structural and management change and expressed his support for all the Office's efforts to enhance the efficiency of protection activities and reduce administrative costs.

50. He welcomed the proactive approach of UNHCR to the problems that irregular and mixed migration flows posed for refugee protection. That issue would be the main focus of the first meeting of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2007. Indeed, for refugee protection to be more effective, measures needed to be taken to prevent the current protection regime from being exploited by illegal immigrants and criminals. China called on all parties concerned to adhere strictly to the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and to prevent the protection regime it had introduced from being misused.

51. The international community, UNHCR and, in particular, developed countries should demonstrate a spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility and assist developing countries — which housed three quarters of the world's refugees — to build capacity in all areas in order to find a lasting solution to the refugee problem. For its part, China was conscientiously fulfilling its international obligations concerning refugees and planned to continue the excellent cooperative relationships it enjoyed with UNHCR and the other parties concerned in order to promote refugee protection throughout the world.

52. **Mr. Attiya** (Egypt) commended UNHCR for its work with refugees around the world but pointed out that, as noted in the report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its fifty-eighth session (A/62/12/Add.1), funding levels were still not sufficient to meet the challenges on the ground.

53. His delegation acknowledged that the exponential increase in the number of internally displaced persons was a serious problem, but took the view that efforts to resolve it should not be at the expense of the Office's original mandate, which was to assist refugees. In view of the intertwined political, economic and humanitarian aspects of the problem, new mechanisms and additional and diverse funding were needed.

54. In order to step up international action to assist refugees, a number of measures must be taken. First, efforts to eliminate the root causes of conflicts throughout the world must be consolidated under the leadership of the General Assembly and Security Council acting in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Second, refugee protection must be addressed within the context of international refugee law and the latter's complementarity with international humanitarian law and human rights instruments must be enhanced. In that regard, neither the human rights of refugees nor the contractual obligations of States should come second to security obsessions or efforts to combat illegal migration. Third, the principles of international solidarity and shared burdens and responsibilities must be applied, including in terms of allowing refugees to return to their countries of origin or to resettle in a third country, especially since most host States were found in the developing world. In addition, countries emerging from conflict required considerable technical and financial support in order to rebuild their institutions and provide basic services to all their citizens, in particular women, children and members of marginalized communities. Lastly, it was important to create an environment conducive to the voluntary repatriation of refugees, namely by offering them job opportunities, setting up rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and including them in national reconciliation and peacebuilding processes. In

that context, the Peacebuilding Commission's role should also be strengthened.

55. Egypt had always participated in efforts to develop and modernize international refugee law. In that regard, it supported the Convention Plus initiative, which was intended to complement the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Egypt hoped that the international community would work together to resolve the refugees problem in all its aspects, particularly in Africa.

56. **Mr. Goltyaev** (Russian Federation) said that his Government sought to advance the protection of refugees by expanding its legislative framework and by promoting a greater respect for the rights of refugees. In that connection, its cooperation with the international organizations involved, among them UNHCR, was very significant.

57. While UNHCR should play a central role in refugee operations, the primary responsibility for addressing the issue of internally displaced persons lay with the State concerned. Other States must stand in solidarity and assume responsibility for assisting it, but at its request and with its consent; that position had been confirmed at the fifty-eighth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

58. His delegation welcomed the UNHCR initiative for the relaunching of an international dialogue on protection issues and believed that the dialogue should also focus on mixed migratory flows, illegal migration control, the suppression of false claims of refugee status and the exchange of information on experience in improving legislation. The dialogue should also place particular emphasis on the reduction and elimination of statelessness, bearing in mind the conclusion adopted on the subject by the Executive Committee in 2006. The situation in Estonia and Latvia was relevant in that connection: the Governments of those countries were endeavouring to introduce and apply a "non-citizenship" concept, which was barely distinguishable from statelessness. Concerted efforts must be made to break the impasse on that issue, and political calculations, false solidarity and double standards had to be set aside. The recent conclusions of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and of the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism could serve as a starting point.

59. The Russian Federation was currently working to ensure better application of its laws protecting the rights of refugees. It was important to ensure that national procedures for granting refugee status followed an approach that was not at odds with the legal guarantees of refugee rights. In addition, his delegation supported the recent UNHCR strategy for finding long-term solutions to the problems of return, voluntary repatriation and reintegration. Concomitantly, in order to deal with exceptional situations involving massive displacements to third countries, it must develop a more well-thought-out approach, in concert with the main regional partners.

60. **Archbishop Migliore** (Observer for the Holy See) noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had taken various steps to make its operations more effective and to better the understanding of the refugee problem, such as the publication of the Operational Protection Reference Guide, the discussions centred on the asylum-migration nexus and the adoption of the cluster approach. However, the responsibility to protect people driven away from their homes by armed conflicts and persecution, extreme poverty, environmental degradation or natural disasters was not the responsibility solely of UNHCR but also of the States concerned, which had to sustain those individuals with adequate political and financial support.

61. He expressed concern at the legal grey areas relating to the status of refugees, especially when rigid migration policies were applied. There were times when doubts arose as to the applicability of existing international instruments, and there were cases where no such instruments existed. It was therefore urgent to make the legal instruments of protection clearer or, if need be, to draw up new ones. Under no circumstances, however, could the dignity and human rights of refugees, displaced persons and undocumented migrants be violated or ignored, and his delegation appealed to all the countries and regions concerned to do everything in their power to protect the rights of such persons.

62. The Holy See was distressed by the condition of populations who had fled or were fleeing the long-running conflicts in Afghanistan, Chad, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere and once again drew the international community's

attention to the suffering of the Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq. Pope Benedict XVI and many Catholic institutions had repeatedly called for urgent action to assist the Iraqi victims of indiscriminate attacks and sectarian violence. It expressed appreciation to the countries neighbouring Iraq that continued to welcome millions of refugees and urged the international community to sustain those countries and UNHCR as they worked on behalf of the Iraqi refugees and displaced persons.

63. **Mr. Rees** (United States of America) observed that thanks to the joint efforts of UNHCR and Member States, approximately one million African refugees had been able to return home over the past two years, but that, in general, the international community was facing an increasing diversity of protection challenges: protecting humanitarian workers; resolving protracted refugee situations; easing the burden on refugee-hosting and refugee-affected countries; implementing innovative approaches to durable solutions that promoted refugee self-reliance; preventing gender-based violence; reducing statelessness; improving the protection of internally displaced persons; and responding effectively to emergencies.

64. The United States strongly supported the UNHCR reform efforts and hoped that the reforms would make the Office more flexible, effective and results-oriented. UNHCR was to be commended for restructuring its budget to improve transparency and urged it to continue consulting Member States to resolve outstanding questions so that the budget could be implemented. The goals must be clearly defined and clear lines of accountability established. His delegation strongly urged UNHCR to do more to implement the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. It was sure that the UNHCR efforts to bring about structural management change would facilitate the task.

65. UNHCR had to rely on partnerships with the Governments of host countries, with other United Nations agencies, with donor countries and with NGOs, as evidenced by the work it was doing to assist displaced persons using the cluster approach. As lead agency within the cluster, UNHCR had shown its serious commitment by conducting real-time evaluations of its own activities. His delegation urged other agencies to examine their responsibilities with similar rigour.

66. **Mr. Vigny** (Switzerland) said that the High Commissioner's report presented a comprehensive overview of the situation of refugees in the world. His delegation was pleased that UNHCR had worked determinedly throughout the year to make its work more effective so that it would be better equipped to face the major challenges that confronted it. Switzerland continued to advocate ratification and observance of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol by the largest number of States, and therefore welcomed UNHCR efforts to strengthen the capacity of host countries with large influxes of refugees. It had taken a number of steps in that regard and had devised a regional protection concept aimed primarily at ensuring that the protection afforded to refugees in their regions of origin was provided more rapidly and effectively.

67. It thanked UNHCR for its action on mixed migratory flows and for its contribution to reflection on international migration, and encouraged all the actors concerned to implement the 10-Point-Plan of Action to address migratory movements.

68. He recalled that ICRC had been assigned the mandate to protect and assist civilian populations in non-international armed conflicts, and called upon stakeholders at all levels to pursue their dialogue on the question. He expressed satisfaction that UNHCR took very seriously the difficulties encountered in applying the cluster approach to dealing with internally displaced persons, an approach that required it to give its own services specific training in operational and management areas.

69. Regarding the major aspects of the UNHCR reform, namely decentralization and improvement of management structures, Switzerland would continue to support the regionalization process, especially with regard to international protection and technical matters.

70. **Ms. Rambøll** (Norway) said that her delegation attached particular importance to the decentralization and regionalization components of the UNHCR reform process, which were aimed at maximizing available resources for beneficiaries in the field. In that regard, it was important to develop clear and concise lines of accountability, reporting and decision-making between the different levels of UNHCR. The decentralization and regionalization process, along with other means, should also be used to ensure gender equity throughout

UNHCR, in accordance with United Nations guidelines for ensuring gender equity at all levels by 2010.

71. Turning to humanitarian reform, recent evaluations had shown that the roll-out of the cluster approach had contributed to improved humanitarian response, suggesting that UNHCR was on the right track in that area. Its efforts as both lead agency and cluster participant were commendable, but much work remained and it must continue to play a key role in that endeavour. The real-time evaluations of the cluster approach had also identified the need to improve human resources capacity and staff deployment routines. UNHCR should address those issues as a matter of priority and, more generally, step up efforts for the further roll-out of the cluster approach at field level.

72. Voluntary repatriation was still the preferred long-term solution in most refugee situations. In general, programmes to facilitate return and reintegration should be strengthened. In that regard, her delegation looked forward to the forthcoming paper by the Policy Development and Evaluation Service on the role of UNHCR in support of return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons in post-conflict and transition situations. It was high time that the international community reintensified its efforts to address early recovery and transition and UNHCR was well placed to take part in the debate on that subject.

73. The value of efforts to assist refugees and internally displaced persons was measured in the field. The situation in and around Darfur continued to pose a serious protection challenge to UNHCR. Her delegation was also deeply concerned about the millions of displaced persons in Iraq and its neighbouring countries. Lastly, it believed that the recommendations of the Emergency Relief Coordinator concerning gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be addressed vigorously.

74. **Ms. Nadjaf** (Afghanistan), recalling that there were still some 3 million Afghans in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, said that the voluntary return and reintegration of all Afghan refugees was a priority for her Government, which was working to facilitate their return and normalize their legal status through constructive dialogue with neighbouring countries. Efforts were also under way to improve the status of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan and to reintegrate them on an expedited basis.

75. In that regard, while it dearly wished to receive all Afghan refugees, her Government called on the international community to proceed gradually and to continue to give it the assistance needed to create an environment conducive to their return and reintegration in safe and dignified conditions. The agreement concluded among the United Nations, UNHCR and the Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran had been a first step in that direction. The Afghanistan Compact, signed in January 2006 would make it possible to continue to work towards a stable and prosperous Afghanistan and to create the necessary conditions for refugees to return. In that regard, she recalled the General Assembly's recent resolution on the situation in Afghanistan. Her Government remained committed to working with the international community and relevant United Nations agencies to address the economic and social requirements that would permit the sustainable return and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

Right of reply

76. **Mr. Ahmed** (Sudan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply to the statement made by the representative of Portugal, said that his Government was working tirelessly to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief and had signed an agreement with the United Nations to ensure the success of its efforts. The attacks in question had targeted rebels, not humanitarian workers. Responsibility for the refugee camps in Darfur rested with his Government, which was discharging that responsibility in cooperation with UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.